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ABSTRACT

Intended for reading teachers and others involved in the testing or placement of students, this paper describes the development and evaluation of a prescribed individualized reading program. Following an introduction to the program (which allows students to progress through each reading level at their own pace), the second and third sections of the paper discuss background information and program goals. The fourth section describes the students involved in the program while the fifth chapter provides a detailed description of the program itself. The remaining three sections detail the program evaluation and its results and present the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluators. (HTH)

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PRESCRIBED INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM

Robert Carlon

A project submitted to the Bear Lake School Board
May 1981

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ABSTRACT

PRESCRIBED INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM

by Robert Carlon

This evaluation was conducted to determine the overall effectiveness of the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program implemented by the elementary staff of Bear Lake Schools.

The Prescribed Individualized Reading Program places elementary students into levels of instruction based upon their diagnosed reading levels. The students are then permitted to progress through a prescribed program at their own individual rate. Students move to new books and new teachers as they move through prescribed levels of instruction. Emphasis is on individual growth and success.

Twenty sixth grade students who experienced four years of the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program were compared to a comparison group of twenty-eight sixth graders who went through a conventional program prior to the implementation of the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program.

Using Stanford Achievement test scores, it was found that the program group achieved significantly more growth (1.0 grade levels) than did the comparison group. It was also found that 40% of the program group reached the highest grade equivalent (10.5) score the Stanford can measure.

A comparison was then made between 1981 second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders and the 1975 (last year be-

fore the program was implemented) second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. Special education students were left out of the study, all other students were included. It was found that the longer a group of students experienced the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program, the greater their reading achievement compared to a similar group which did not experience the program.

It is recommended that the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program be continued and that it be implemented to a greater extent in the lower grades. Further study is needed on individual aspects of the program. Better evaluation instruments and procedures are needed for future evaluations.

Introduction

When faced with the task of implementing an effective reading program, educators look for a program that will work best within their particular school environment. There is an abundance of research on reading, however, the educator is still faced with the task of implementing a reading program, using that research information, which will work within his/her particular school environment.

Most schools divide reading instruction by grade level, often with two, three, or four subgroups. Wiesendanger and Birlem found that most reading teachers divided their classes into three subgroups. (high, medium, and low) They also found that once a student was placed in a group, it was unlikely that the student would be reevaluated and/or placed into different groups during that school year.[1]

Another problem with placing children in a group is the danger of placing them in the wrong group. Standardized reading test scores are a common criteria for placement of child-

[1]Katherine D. Wiesendanger and Ellen D. Birlem, Adapting Grouping Patterns to Maximize Reading Achievement Within An Elementary School Classroom, (Survey prepared at Alfred University, 1978) p. 1

ren into reading groups. Studies by Hogben and others have proven standardized reading tests to be unreliable for placement of students in reading groups. Standardized reading tests are usually even more unreliable when used to measure gain of students and therefore should not be used to evaluate a reading program.[2]

When a teacher divides his/her children into three nearly equal groups, as is a fairly common practice, another problem occurs. Hogben points out that this practice results in the middle group being restricted at both ends. However, the lower group at the lower end and the upper group at the upper end remain open ended. If there are a few very poor readers and a few very good readers in these groups, the ranges of the high and low groups are stretched much wider than the middle group.[3]

Educators agree that all children are different. They enter school with different abilities and once in school they achieve at different rates. Furthermore, as children progress through the grades, their range of differences increase rather than decrease. Miles V. Zintz expresses the implications of this fact for teachers.

> Knowing that all children are so very different from each other, and that the longer the children attend school the greater become the range of differences in all types of skills, abilities, interests, and ambitions, teachers cannot rely on teaching any one thing to all members of a given class.

[2]Donald Hogben, Grouping Primary School Pupils for Instruction in Reading on the Basis of Scores from Standardized Reading, (Australian Journal of Education; Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 295-302, October 1978) p. 301

[3]Ibid. p. 297.

> Consequently, any teacher who accepts the facts about the way children grow, develop, learn, and satisfy their curiosities, must be searching for adequately innovative ways to manage his classroom so that each child does have opportunity to stretch himself outward on the growing edge of learning.[4]

According to Miles Zintz, teachers can expect to find a range of reading achievement, as measured by standardized tests, of about, three years by the end of the second grade, four years by the end of the third grade, five years by the end of the fourth grade, six years by the end of the fifth grade, and seven years by the end of the sixth grade. Zintz gives the range of general knowledge as being even broader, with about an eleven year span for sixth grade classrooms.[5] In addition, each child has four levels of reading. The independent level in which the child can read fluently and fully comprehend. The instructional level is the ideal level for teaching and it is defined as the level in which the child makes no more than five errors per one hundred words and achieves at lease seventy-five percent comprehension. The frustration level is the level teachers should avoid placing children in, it is the lowest level at which difficulties become obvious, comprehension is below seventy-five percent, many words are mispronounced or substituted, etc. The last level is the capacity level and is the theoretical level of the students potential. The capacity level is the highest level at which the student can achieve at least seventy-

[4]Miles V. Zintz, The Reading Process, (Wm. C. Brown Company, Publisher, 1973), p. 79

[5]Ibid.

five percent comprehension on material which is read to him.[6]

Given the wide range of reading achievement within children of a grade level, and the fact that every child functions at several levels, it is obvious that most children are not being taught at their instructional level, even when the teacher divides the readers into subgroups. Some children are locked into a group at their independent level and worse yet, some children are locked into a group at their frustration level.

Gipe found that only seven of the thirty-one fifth grade children she tested were reading at their appropriate instructional reading levels. Seventy-seven percent were inaccurately placed.[7]

Brown found that of sixty children tested with the Informal Reading Inventory, twenty-three percent were placed below their instructional level and forty-five percent were placed above their instructional level. Therefore, sixth-eight percent of the children studied were inaccurately placed in reading texts by their classroom teacher.[8]

Not only are children placed into groups which do not meet their needs and may even be harmful for them, they are often locked into those groups and forced to progress through the mat-

[6]Zintz, op. cit.

[7]Joyce Gipe, Teacher Group Placement Compared to Informal Reading Inventory Placement, unpublished paper, College of Education, (University of New Mexico, 1967)

[8]Dianne B. Brown, The Preparation, Use, and Analysis of the Results of the Informal Reading Inventory, unpublished Masters Thesis, (University of New Mexico, 1968)

erial at the same rate as others, regardless of whether that rate is too fast or too slow for the individual child. Seldom do teachers reevaluate a child once he/she is part of an established group.[9]

An effective reading program must be concerned with the well being of every child within the program and must seek the optimum reading achievement of each child within that program. Therefore, an effective reading program must accommodate the wide range of abilities among its' students, it must assure that each student is reading materials at his/her instructional level, and it must allow each student to progress at his/her individual rate.

Since children's reading levels cross the boundaries of grade levels, it seems natural to expect an effective reading program to also cross those boundaries. To be effective, a reading program should be system wide and progress from kindergarden through high school.

The advantages of a program which includes the above qualities, are great. Each child will have the optimum opportunity for growth and achievement. Better readers will continue to be stretched and challenged by material which is at their instructional level. Poor readers will be assigned material at their instructional level - material which they can read and will experience success with.

Every child will be able to experience some degree of success with such a program. Finding himself/herself competing

[9]Wiesendanger and Birlem, op. cit. p. 2

only with himself/herself, a child is much more likely to have a positive self-image than he/she would in a system which keeps him/her frustrated or bored. Recent research on the role of self-image on reading achievement, reveals that students with high self-image achieve more than students with low self-images. Furthermore, high self-images and achievement seem to be so interrelated that it becomes difficult to define which is cause and which is effect.[10]

Motivation is closely related with success. Jackson and Fui'Runyun found that reading teachers responding to their survey, ranked motivation skills as the most important teacher skill. They conclude that, "Creating an enthusiastic, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom that will motivate children to read" is the most important skill needed by a reading teacher. It is understandable that the child locked into a reading program at his/her frustration level and experiencing little or no success, is apt to be less motivated than he/she might be if correctly placed.[11]

An effective reading program, therefore, should include a means of accurately placing children at their instructional level, a means for children to progress at their individual rates, and a means to provide success experiences which promote a positive self-image in young readers. Teachers should develop skills in motivating children, creating a positive reading environment, and accurately evaluating the reading levels of their students.

[10]James I. Brown and Earl E. McDowell, The Role of Self-Image on Reading Rate and Comprehension Achievement, (Reading Improvement: Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring 1979), pp. 22-27

[11]James E. Jackson and Yvonne Steinruck Fui'Runyun, The Ten Most Important Teaching Skills, unpublished paper, (ERIC, April 1980.)

Children should be encouraged to compete with themselves rather than with others in reading.

Background Information

Bear Lake Schools is a small class D school district in northern Michigan. The total K-12 enrollemnt is less than five hundred students. Elementary enrollment is less than two hundred students.

The number of teachers involved with this reading program varied from five to seven depending upon the enrollemnt of the particular year.

The program began in the fall of 1977 as an attempt to further improve reading instruction in the upper elementary. The program was a cooperative effort between the elementary teachers and the elementary principal. No formal program was available, instead a practical means of implementing the principles discussed in the beginning of this paper were sought and the program then evolved.

Genuine desire on the part of the elementary staff to improve the Bear Lake reading program, resulted in the eventual success of this program. Developing a new program, creating supplemental materials, and becoming familiar with a new reading series all at the beginning of the 1977 school year, resulted in a heavy demand on the teachers. In spite of the heavy work load, the staff did a remarkable job.

Program Goals

The main goal of the reading program was to improve read-

ing achievement. In order to achieve this goal, other goals had to be reached, including accurate placement of students at their instructional level, a means for students to progress at individual rates, and a means to provide success experiences to students.

In addition to optimum reading achievement, it was assumed that the program would have a positive effect on self-esteem, motivation, increased recreational reading and the students' general attitude toward school. No attempt was made to measure any of these factors.

Students Involved in the Study

The program group was chosen because it was the first class to experience the new reading program in grades 3 through 6. Special education students were eliminated from the study as were any students that did not go through the whole program.

The comparison group was the last sixth grade class to not experience any of the new reading program. Again special education students were eliminated from the comparison group in this study.

Program

The program was designed to be a series of groups beginning in the third grade and progressing through the 8th grade. Each group corresponded to a level in the Scott, Foresman, Reading Unlimited Series. Each teacher was responsible for several levels.

The lower elementary used the same series, but, grouped children in the conventional manner. At the third grade

children were permitted to progress at their own rate. Some third graders were permitted to "skip" levels if their grade equivalent scores from the Gates-MacGinitie indicated they should be placed at a higher level.

All fourth, fifth, and sixth graders were tested and placed into a reading level based upon their individual test score. When it was questionable as to which of two levels a child should be placed in, the lower level was assigned in order to avoid the possibility of placing the child at his frustration level.

It was assumed that testing error would not result in misplacement of a child for a long period, since each child was permitted to progress through a level at his/her own rate.

Children were encouraged to progress at their own rates. Some children worked through several levels in a one year period and others only went through a couple of levels.

Since a single level may contain third, fourth, fifth, and even sixth graders, teachers were concerned about damaging the self-image of older children in groups. It was concluded that the benefits of such grouping out-weighed the disadvantages. Each teacher discussed the new reading program with his/her class, explained the reasons for it, and did as much as possible to prepare the students before the new groups were formed.

The students accepted the new reading program easily. Many students immediately experienced growth spurts in reading achievement. Discipline problems seemed to decline during the reading period as well.

Each teacher was assigned several levels. The teacher then designed lessons, quizzes, worksheets, vocabulary lists, and post tests for each level. The teachers also created and compiled supplemental material for each level to be used by children needing more reinforcement of certain skills.

Each lesson was designed to be done independently by the student. Therefore, each student worked through a level at a different rate than other students in the same level.

A student was permitted to move to the next level when ever he/she successfully completed the previous level. Likewise, a student can change from teacher to teacher at any time during the school year. Therefore, a student may work through several levels in a years time resulting in several "new" books, "new" reading teachers, and moving to "new" rooms. Most students found a great deal of satisfaction in making these changes.

Faculty and Others Involved

Five to seven elementary teachers and the elementary principal were involved in designing and implementing the program.

No special training was given to the staff prior to, or during the program. Teacher aids and high school cadets were used to help with reading. Teacher aids and cadets were used before the program was implemented, in the same capacity.

Program Evaluation

Purpose:

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine if group-

ing students according to their reading ability and permitting them to progress at individual rates, does indeed improve reading achievement.

Likewise, a comparison between the conventional method of grouping students by grade level and this method of grouping students by ability level will be made.

Evaluation Design:

Simple comparison between the program group (P-group) and the comparison group (C-group) was the basis for this evaluation.

Because of the small size of the school district and the commitment of the staff to the new program, no control group was available for study.

The comparison group was the last sixth grade group to not be exposed to the new program. The comparison group is believed to be similar to the program group except for the reading program. Special education students were eliminated from the study for both the comparison group and the program group.

Also compared were all grades (2-6) for 1976 and 1981. It was believed that the program effectiveness was great enough to result in higher mean scores for the 1981 second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades than the corresponding grade in 1976.

Outcome Measures:

Stanford Achievement test scores were used to measure both the program group and the comparison group. The Stanford was chosen because Bear Lake Schools administers the Stanford Achievement test to all elementary students at the end of the

second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Therefore, comparisons could be made to previous grades.

Both the reliability and validity of the Stanford Achievement are acceptable for this evaluation. The Standard error measurement for sixth graders is 3.5 (raw score) for reading comprehension and 2.9 (raw score) for word study skills. Total reading scores were used to make the comparisons. Total reading scores are the reading comprehension and the work study skills.

The means for each group were converted to grade equivalent scores for comparison purposes.

In most cases the test was administered by the same teacher for each grade. In other words the sixth grade teacher administered the test to both sixth grades compared.

There was some discrepancy between test forms in the lower grades of the comparison group. The older form of the test was used for those years.

The results of work study skills were not avialable for the fifth grade of the comparison and therefore were not included in the evaluation.

Results

Table 1

Mean Grade Equivalent Scores-(Stanford Achievement-Total Reading)

Grade	Comparison Group	Program Group
Second	3.5	4.1
Third	4.3	5.8
Fourth	4.8	6.5
Fifth	Not Available	7.2
Sixth	7.3	8.9

The program group at the end of the second grade had a mean grade equivalent of 0.6 grade levels higher than the comparison group. By the end of the sixth grade, the program group had a mean grade equivalent 1.6 grade levels higher than the comparison group.

Table 2

Growth Comparisons (4 years)

Grade	Comparison Group	Program Group
Second	3.5	4.1
Sixth	7.3	8.9
Total Growth	3.8	4.8

The program group experienced 4.8 grade levels growth for the four year period. The comparison group experienced 3.8 grade levels growth for the similar four year period. Therefore, the program group experienced 1.0 grade levels greater growth than did the comparison group.

Table 3

Comparison of Mean Reading Levels Between Grades
(mean grade equivalent scores)

Grade	1976	1981	Difference
Second	3.5	Not Available	N/A
Third	5.0	5.0	0.0
Fourth	5.9	6.0	0.1
Fifth	6.0	6.8	0.8
Sixth	7.3	8.6	1.3

It was assumed that the greater the exposure to the program, the higher the mean grade equivalent scores would be. Each 1981 grade was compared to the same grade in 1976 which did not receive any of the program.

Special education students were not included in the study. All other students were included. Students who transferred into the program from other schools were included in the study even though they didn't receive as much of the program as their classmates and lowered the mean scores for the 1981 grades.

As expected, the greater the exposure to the program, the greater the improvement in mean scores over the corresponding 1976 grade. This improvement was clearly greater in the fifth and sixth grades than in the second and third grades.

The 1981 sixth grade has a mean grade equivalent of 8.6 which is 1.2 grade levels greater than the corresponding 1976 sixth grade. The 1981 fifth grade had a mean grade equivalent of 6.8 which is 0.8 grade levels greater than the corresponding 1976 fifth grade. The 1981 fourth grade had a mean grade equivalent of 6.0 which is only 0.1 grade levels greater than the corresponding 1976 fourth grade. There was no difference between the means of the 1981 third grade and the 1976 third grade. Data was not available for the 1981 second grade since the test was not administered at the time of this study.

Discussion of Results

Even though the groups are small in size (twenty students for the program group and twenty-eight students for the comparison group) and that a true control group was not available, the results of this study indicate that the reading program has had an educationally significant effect on reading achievement.

The comparison group is believed to be very comparable

to the program group in spite of the 0.6 grade level difference in the second grade. Two different test forms were used and could account for the difference. The increase in achievement over the comparison group for each grade level strongly suggests a positive effect from the program on the program group.

Further evidence of the program's effectiveness can be found by examining table 1. The program group experienced a growth of 1.6 grades during the third grade which was the first year they experienced the program. The comparison group only experienced a growth of 0.8 grade levels during the third grade. After this growth spurt, the program group continued to grow at a slightly faster rate than did the comparison group.

The program's effectiveness is further indicated by table 3, which shows that the greater the exposure to the program, the greater the improvement in reading scores.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The overall effectiveness of the reading program as based upon Stanford Achievement reading scores is excellent. The program seems to have increased the mean reading level of each class exposed to the program.

No attempt has been made to determine which aspects of the program are most beneficial. Nor has any attempt been made to evaluate any factors other than the overall effectiveness of the program.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence, I would recommend that the reading program be continued, that the possibility of implementing it in the lower grades be explored, and that further study be done on individual aspects of the program.

A better measurement instrument than the Stanford Achievement is needed, since 40% of the program group reached the highest grade equivalent (10.5) score the Stanford can measure.

Further research is indicated in the fourth and sixth grades. Both the comparison group and the program group seemed to experience a decrease in growth in the fourth grade and an increase in the sixth grade.

Changing teachers seems to be a highly motivating experience for most students. Therefore, the possibility of assigning teachers to levels in a way that a student changes teachers each time he/she changes levels, should be explored.

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SUMMARY

This evaluation was conducted to determine the overall effectiveness of the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program implemented by the elementary staff of Bear Lake Schools.

The Prescribed Individualized Reading Program places elementary students into levels of instruction based upon their diagnosed reading levels. The students are then permitted to progress through a prescribed program at their own individual rate. Students move to new books and new teachers as they move through prescribed levels of instruction. Emphasis is on individual growth and success.

Twenty sixth grade students who experienced four years of the prescribed Individualized Reading Program were compared to a comparison group of twenty-eight sixth graders who went through a conventional program prior to the implementation of the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program.

Using Stanford Achievement test scores, it was found that the program group achieved significantly more growth (1.0 grade levels) than did the comparison group. It was also found that 40% of the program group reached the highest grade equivalent (10.5) score the Stanford can measure.

A comparison was then made between 1981 second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders and the 1976 (last year before the program was implemented) second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. Special education students were left out of the study, all other students were included. It was found that

the longer a group of students experienced the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program, the greater their reading achievement compared to a similar group which did not experience the program.

It is recommended that the Prescribed Individualized Reading Program be continued and that it be implemented to a greater extent in the lower grades. Further study is needed on individual aspects of the program. Better evaluation instruments and procedures are needed for future evaluations.